

OPTIONAL EA, FONSI and DR FORM

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

EA NUMBER: OR-030-01-013

BLM Office: Vale District, Jordan Resource Area

Proposed Action Title/Type: **Morrison Ranch Well Construction**

Location of Proposed Action: **T.27S., R.43E., Sec. 7 SE 1/4**

Applicant (if any): N/A

Conformance With Applicable Land Use Plan

This proposed action is subject to the following land use plan(s):

NAME OF PLAN

Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee National Wild and
Scenic Rivers Management Plan and Environmental Assessment
Southern Malheur Management Framework Plan

DATE APPROVED

September 1993
March 1983

This plan has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by CFR 1610.5.

REMARKS: The Vale BLM District manages the Birch Creek and Morrison Ranches as historic cultural properties bordering the Owyhee Wild and Scenic River in southeast Oregon. Isolated from normal rural/urban conveniences such as running water, electricity, and telephone lines, the ranch is dependent upon well-water, solar power and diesel generators, and satellite phone or radio communications for maintenance of caretaker living quarters approaching normal living standards. While the Birch Creek facility currently has a well for potable water, there is no well or other potable source at the Morrison facility, nearly one mile downriver from Birch Creek.

NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION: The Morrison Ranch property is open year-round to the general public (as road conditions permit) and receives several hundred visitors each year. Currently, BLM maintains several outbuildings at the ranch, including three that will eventually be open to the public as fee-based overnight lodging quarters. Even while those buildings are not currently available for habitation, there is continual demand for potable water for visitors' camping/day-use needs at Morrison Ranch. Due to distance between Birch Creek and Morrison Ranches, and the narrow and extremely rocky topography of that stretch of river canyon, any attempt to pipe potable water downstream from Birch Creek to Morrison would be cost-prohibitive and would require several hundred yards of trenching, rock-blasting, and disruption of the existing road access between the two ranches.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION: The proposed action would be to drill and case a well approximately 300ft. by 6in. Well casing would be capped and extend approximately 18in. above the soil surface. The well would include a drill pad, pump, pitless adapter and well head, electrical wiring from the well head to a generator, and a water pipe to the existing subsurface water lines nearby. Installation of the pitless adapter would allow future maintenance on the pump to be practically impact-free. Existing roads would be used to access the well site.

The drill pad would be 20ft. by 20ft. with a working area of approximately 100ft. by 100ft. The electrical line ditch would be approximately 80ft. by 6in., and the 2in. water pipe ditch would be about 25ft. by 6in. A ditch witch would be used to dig the ditches for the electrical line and water pipe, while a truck-mounted well-digging vehicle would be used to drill the well. The disturbed area would be reseeded with a native seed mix. Resource area personnel would be onsite during construction to ensure compliance with project stipulations.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS:

Critical Element	Affected	
	Yes	No
Air Quality		x
ACECs		x
Cultural Resources		x
Farmlands, Prime/Unique		x
Floodplains		x
Invasive, Nonnative Species		x
Nat. Amer. Rel. Concerns		x

Critical Element	Affected	
	Yes	No
T&E Species		x
Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		x
Water Quality		x
Wetlands/Riparian Zones		x
Wild & Scenic Rivers	x	
Environmental Justice		x
Wilderness		x

DESCRIPTION OF IMPACTS: There would be minor negative impacts including crushing vegetation and compacting soils within the 100ft. by 100ft. well working area from vehicles and construction workers. These impacts would intensify toward the center of the working area with all vegetation removed in an area approximately 20ft. by 20ft. at the well head. Trenching for the buried electrical line and water pipe would also create very minor short-term impacts until refilling and revegetation of soil surface occurs. Short-term noise pollution would occur while drilling and trenching are being done. Impacts would be minimized by complying with the design features and stipulations as required in the well construction programmatic EA, OR-030-0-44 (attached).

The proposed project would occur within the federally-designated Wild and Scenic River corridor for the Owyhee River. However, the immediate surrounding area already contains numerous outbuildings, fencelines, fuel storage tanks, irrigation lines and risers, etc., which impact outstandingly remarkable values for which the river was designated. Post-construction phase for this well project will leave only minor visual evidence of modern man-made structures or facilities. Siting of the project has been done to blend in with existing structures and disturbance as much as possible.

Positive impacts include providing a reliable potable water system for the visiting public at the Morrison Ranch. Providing potable water could stimulate a slight increase in visitation, but likely not of sufficient magnitude to create adverse effects on the Wild and Scenic River corridor or its outstandingly remarkable values (recreation, scenic, wildlife, geologic, and cultural).

DESCRIPTION OF MITIGATION MEASURES AND RESIDUAL IMPACTS:

Mitigation measures and residual impacts would be those addressed in the attached well construction programmatic EA, OR-030-0-44 (pages 11-12). In addition to the programmatic EA measures, the work area and electrical and water pipe ditches will be revegetated with a native grass seed mix. Construction activities would be conducted in late summer or autumn, outside peak visitation season.

Persons/Agencies Consulted: BLM, Jordan Resource Area, Malheur Resource Area, and Vale District staffs

Preparer(s): Tom Christensen, Outdoor Recreation Planner
Date: July 2, 2001

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined that the proposed action with the mitigation measures described below will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required. I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved land use plan.

Mitigation measures/Remarks:

Mitigation measures described in the attached well construction programmatic EA, OR-030-0-44 address the environmental impacts for the proposed action. Also, the proposed action contains measures to offset impacts. The mitigation measures have been formulated into stipulations and incorporated by reference into this decision.

Authorized Official: S/ Jerry Taylor
(Signature)

Date: 10/01/2001

DECISION RECORD

It is my decision to implement the proposal as described in EA #**OR-030-01-013** with the mitigation measures identified below.

MITIGATION MEASURES/REMARKS:

Mitigation measures described in the attached well construction programmatic EA, OR-030-0-44 address the environmental impacts for the proposed action. Also for the proposed action, the work area and electrical and water pipe ditches will be revegetated with a native grass seed mix. Additionally, construction activities will be conducted in autumn, outside of peak visitation season.

Authorized Official: S/ Jerry Taylor
(Signature)

Date: 10/29/2001